

REMARKS

The Office Action mailed January 20, 2006, has been received and the Examiner's comments carefully reviewed. Claim 34 has been indicated to be allowable if rewritten in independent form. Accordingly, claim 34 has been rewritten in independent form by including the features of claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 in independent claim 16 and claims 31 and 34 have been accordingly cancelled. Claims 24-30 have been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer. Applicants reserve the right to pursue these claims in future continuing applications. Dependent claim 32 that previously depended from claim 31 has been amended to now depend from claim 16. Dependent claims 35, 36, and 38-40 that previously depended from claim 34 have been amended to now depend from claim 16. No new matter has been added. Claims 16-23, 32, 33, and 35-40 are currently pending. Favorable reconsideration of this application is requested in view of the following remarks.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

In the Office Action, claims 16, 18, 19, and 24 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Girard (U.S. Patent No. 5,949,350) in view of Peinetti (U.S. Patent No. 6,151,276).

In the Office Action, claim 34 has been objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but has been indicated to be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants thank the Examiner for this notification.

As noted above, claim 34 has been rewritten in independent form by including the features of claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 in independent claim 16. Claims 31 and 34 have been cancelled accordingly. For at least this reason, independent claim 16 and dependent claims 18 and 19 that depend from claim 16 are patentable over Girard in view of Peinetti.

Claim 24 has been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer rendering the rejection moot for this claim.

Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 17, 22, 23, 25, and 30 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Girard and Peinetti in view of Kubler (U.S. Patent No. 6,525,648).

As noted above, features of allowable claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 have been incorporated into independent claim 16. Thus, claims 17, 22, and 23 which depend from claim 16 are patentable over Girard and Peinetti in view of Kubler for at least the same reasons specified with respect to claim 16.

Claims 25 and 30 have been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer rendering the rejection moot for these claims.

Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 24-27 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Girard and Peinetti in view of Kubler (U.S. Patent No. 6,525,648).

As noted above, claims 24-27 have been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer rendering the rejection moot for these claims.

Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 22, 29, and 39 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Kubler in view of Watkins (U.S. Patent No. 6,150,948).

As noted above, features of allowable claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 have been incorporated into independent claim 16. Thus, dependent claim 22 and also claim 39 which now depends from claim 16 are patentable over Kubler in view of Watkins for at least the same reasons specified with respect to claim 16.

Claim 29 has been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer rendering the rejection moot for this claim.

Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

In the Office Action, claims 21 and 28 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Girard.

As noted above, features of allowable claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 have been incorporated into independent claim 16. Thus, claim 21 which depends from claim 16 is patentable over Girard for at least the same reasons specified with respect to claim 16.

Claim 28 has been cancelled without prejudice or disclaimer rendering the rejection moot for this claim.

Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

Allowable Subject Matter

In the Office Action, claims 34-40 have been objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but have been indicated to be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants thank the Examiner for this notification.

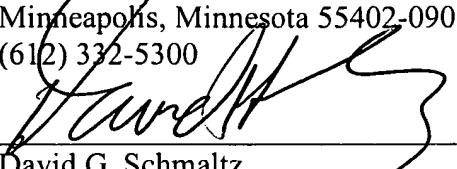
As noted above, claim 34 has been rewritten in independent form by including the features of claim 34 and of intervening claim 31 in independent claim 16. Claims 31 and 34 have been cancelled accordingly. Dependent claim 32 that previously depended from claim 31 has been amended to now depend from claim 16. Dependent claims 35, 36, and 38-40 that previously depended from claim 34 have been amended to now depend from claim 16.

It is respectfully submitted that each of the presently pending claims is in condition for allowance and notification to that effect is requested. Although certain arguments regarding patentability are set forth herein, there may be other arguments and reasons why the claimed inventions are patentably distinct. Applicant reserves the right to raise these arguments in the future.

If the Examiner believes a telephone conference would advance the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,

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